THE
HISTORIAN
OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Website: hchsm.org

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi — October 2025

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, October 16, 2025. The luncheon will feature a conversation with Pat Murphy about growing up in Bay Saint Louis. Also book signing. ***Reservations are required*** and may be made by calling 228-467-4090. **Please call no later than *noon on Wednesday, October 15,*** to make your reservation. Seating is limited to forty-eight (48) people, and we need to order the correct number of lunches. **Served at noon, lunch is $15.00 for members and $17.00 for nonmembers,** payable at the door. The catering order is submitted on Wednesday at noon prior to the luncheon on Thursday. If you need to cancel your reservation, please call by noon on Wednesday prior to the luncheon if at all possible so that the society does not incur unnecessary expenses. It is catered by Almost Home Catering with Chef Michelle Nichols. The menu for the luncheon this month is blackened chicken breast, tomato basil pasta, green beans, yeast rolls, and red velvet trifle.

The 31st annual Cemetery Tour will be presented on Halloween night from 4:30-6:30 pm. Doctors, pharmacists, a nurse, a dentist, and others will appear, as we highlight "Health and General Wealth." We would love your help! We need actors, cemetery guides, and hosts at the Lobrano House. Call to volunteer. 228-467-4090

Michelangelo created this unfinished and broken *Pietá* between 1547 and 1555. It stands in the Cathedral St. Maria del Fiore in Florence, Italy. The studio model for this larger statue, which spent two days in Waveland in 1947, is the subject of the following story.

A MICHELANGELO UNDER THE BED

(*Reprint of an article in the August 1995* Historian
By Edith Back)

Edited by
Eddie Coleman

A visit of the Vatican's Pietá by Michelangelo to the 1964 New York World's Fair was heralded as the first visit of an original sculpture by the great Italian Renaissance artist to the United States. But, in 1947 another Michelangelo Pietá, stealthily carried to protect it from thieves, was brought to this country. Its owners, the citizens of Clermont-Ferrand, France, hoped to raise money to rebuild the waterworks in their town, left devastated and destitute by World War II.

In its brief sojourn in America, the sculpture, which depicts the fallen Christ in His Mother's arms accompanied by Mary Magdalene and Nicodemus, arrived in Florida and traveled through Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana to its destination in

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Eddie Coleman, Editor
Lobrano House Director

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LOBRANO HOUSE HOURS
MONDAY — FRIDAY
10:00AM — 3:00PM
CLOSED 12—1 (lunch)

MISSION STATEMENT

"TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION."

Texas, where it was hoped that one of a number of wealthy art patrons or museums would buy it.

Entrusted with the task of transporting the statue and finding a buyer were Wendell and Bianca Howard, friends of Katherine "Kitty" Kearny Hacker. En route from Florida to Texas, the travelers stopped at the Waveland summer home of Mrs. James Robert, sister of Mrs. Hacker. Interviewed in 1995, the late Kearny Robert, nephew of Mrs. Hacker, son of Mrs. Robert, and resident of Waveland, remembered that visit well.

"I went to dinner with my parents; my Aunt Kitty, who died in 1994 at age one hundred, was there with the Howards, her old friends. Aunt Kitty mentioned that the Howards brought with them a statue by Michelangelo that they were commissioned to sell." It was brought out from the guest room, where it had spent the night in its crate under a bed. Weeks later, on its return from Texas, the statue spent another night under the same bed in the Robert home.

One may ask why the Howards were chosen for such an important task. The answer is that the citizens of Clermont-Ferrand knew and trusted the Polish-born Bianca, wife of the war-interned American Wendell Howard. She had spent most of her childhood in St. Alons, and during the war, she was a Resistance Fighter with the French Underground. When Mr. Howard was freed after the war, the pair settled in Pensacola, Florida.

In 1947 the Howards were commissioned by the citizens of Clermont-Ferrand to bring the statue to the States and find a buyer. There was no trouble importing the Michelangelo since objects older than one hundred years enter duty free and because Wendell Howard traveled under diplomatic immunity granted for the occasion.

Continuing their journey from Florida, the Howards, together with Mrs. Hacker and Mrs. Robert, headed for Texas to show the statue. However, the three-million-dollar price tag didn't bring any buyers. Unfortunately, the sculpture was also seen by a pair of sophisticated thieves working for a dealer of stolen artworks. They followed

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Proposed Bay Saint Louis Rail Fares Upset Local Commuters

The year is 1947 and L&N Railroad is proposing to discontinue commuter rates for Gulf Coast riders. Back in the day commuters, including students, could buy ticket books at a discounted rate.

Mr. Clarke Shumaker, a traveling passenger agent for L&N, spoke to the Bay-Waveland Garden Club to give them the information they requested relative to the discontinuation of the commuter rates to the coast.

Mr. Shumaker said that the railroad is issuing ten, twenty and thirty trip book each at the .0135 per mile rate and a 62-trip book at .0068 per mile; and a school book at .0058.

Assuming a 60-mile one way trip to New Orleans the cost would be as follows:

10, 20, 30 trip ticket book fare would be .81 cents

62 trip ticket book fare would be .41cents

A school book fare would be .35 cents

(Continued on page 3 as L&N)

the statue from Texas back to the east, where the Michelangelo was left in the vault of a Mobile, Alabama, bank.

By this time the French Embassy had contacted the Howards and asked that the statue be returned since Marshall Plan money was available. A courier was dispatched from Washington to fetch the statue. He went to the bank with an empty travel case or bag, but left the bank with a full one. Rather than the statue, however, the case contained the many documents that accompanied it. The aforementioned thieves followed him and the bag, stole the bag, and hanged the courier in the basement of the hotel in which he was staying. When investigation into the death proved fruitless, officials declared it a suicide and closed the case. The perpetrators were never captured.

Fortunately, the statue was saved, and the Embassy sent two well-guarded couriers to retrieve it. Since then it has reposed in the cathedral at St. Alons. The story of the Pieta, restored to the cathedral at St. Alons, France, is one of mystery and intrigue.

About thirty inches high, the sculpture of Carrara marble was a studio model for a much larger work intended for the sepulcher of Lorenzo di Medici, patron of Michelangelo Buonarroti of Florence. The full-sized statue is in the Cathedral St. Maria del Fiore in Florence, but all experts agree that it is cruder than the model because it is unfinished. One theory is that dissatisfied with the work Michelangelo destroyed it only to have his students restore it. However, a number of experts have stated their belief that the model is superior to the larger statue.

Catherine di Medici, Lorenzo's granddaughter, watched Michelangelo work in the artists' studio of her grandfather. When she left for France to wed the Duke d'Orleans, later Henry II of France, Michelangelo presented her with the statue, which she installed in the private chapel of her summer palace at Clermont-Ferrand. Since the Medicis forbade the export of any work of Michelangelo, the Pietá was smuggled out to Catherine under the robe of a Benedictine monk. For some two hundred years, the Pietá remained in Catherine's chapel. During the French Revolution it was hidden deep in the recesses of St. Alyre Abbey at Clermont-Ferrand. It remained there until World War II. Once Hitler's army occupied France, the statue left Clermont-Ferrand and was hidden by priests in the small village of St. Alons in northern France. Fortunately, the search for the Pietá throughout the war by Hitler's henchmen was in vain.

SOURCE:

"Michelangelo" vertical file. Hancock County Historical Society.

STATUE FOLLOW UP

By
Beverly Robert Frater

The statue's visit to America lasted at least four years. A United Press article found in the *Schenectady Gazette* of March 24, 1952, reported that it was on display at that time in Birmingham, Alabama, at the Birmingham Art Museum. A recent Google search revealed no new information as to its story while in the United States.

Thankfully, the Historical Society retained copies of the documents that my father shared. His copies were washed away in Hurricane Katrina – a harsh reminder that every bit of documentation should always be backed up and shared!

L&N from page 2:

Over the period from January to August 1946 Mr. Shumaker said the railroad had issued,
1,538 ten trip books, 38 twenty trip books, 134 thirty trip books, 2 four-month books, 19 six-month books and 44 yearly trip books.
The group asked Mr. Shumaker for the figures on just how many general travelers had traveled to the coast area during this period. This information would be forthcoming, he said. He advised that he had been instructed to give the group a "no" answer in this matter.
The club informed him that further steps would be taken with the Interstate Commerce commission. They had previously acted through telegrams to the proper bureaus and officials at Washington.

Source: Sea Coast Echo 1947, July 22 Vol 52-No 29
Notes:

1. The article made no mention of the amount of fare increase.
2. L&N Railroad was merged with Seaboard Systems its parent company in 1982 and Seaboard merged into CSX in 1986.

Chris Roth
President

WW II MUSEUM

Sponsored by the Hancock County Historical Society, the trip will take place on Thursday, January 22, 2026.

The train leaves from Bay St. Louis in the morning at 8:42 and arrives in New Orleans at 10:12. Departure from New Orleans in the evening is 6:42, arriving in Bay St. Louis at 8:13.

The cost for the group (a minimum of 8) is $19 per person which is 60% off the regular round trip price.

The cost for seniors at the Museum is $29. (There are extra tours and films that can be purchased as well as meals at the museum).

If you are interested, please sign up at the Kate Lobrano House by November 1, 2025, and pay by December 1, 2025.

The American Revolution

A Ken Burns production with co-producer Sarah Botstein

Premiers Sunday, November 16, 2025, on PBS

The show will air for six straight nights concluding on Friday, November 21.

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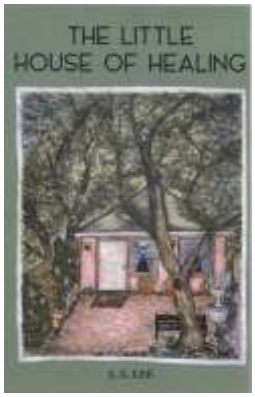

In *The Little House of Healing* by L.L. Lee, nine troubled individuals from a recently divorced woman to a courageous cancer battler, seek solace and a fresh start in the serene haven of Miss Lucy's peaceful Bay St. Louis cottage. This inspirational novel explores redemption and the resilience of the human spirit.

Available at Amazon.com, Historical Society, and some local shops in Bay St. Louis

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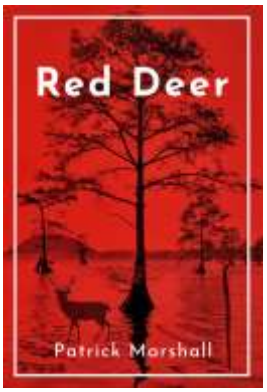

Red Deer is fantasy infused historical fiction. Jesse Walker, a 16 year old from present day Gulf Coast Mississippi, is transported back through time to the legendary birthplace of the Choctaw people, NanihWaiya village.

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